

The Nativity of our Lord; Christmas Eve
1 John 4:9-14
“God Reveals Love”

This is how God’s love for us was revealed: God has sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we may live through him. This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us so much, we also should love one another.

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love has been brought to its goal in us. This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

Would you agree with me that sometimes God’s love for this world is easy to see? The sun shines. The pantry is full of food. Friends laugh together. Parents and children hug. Work fulfills us and satisfies us. But sometimes God love for this world is harder to believe. This is Christmas Eve, and we won’t let things get too dark, but you know what I mean. To say the least, things in the world aren’t always exactly wonderful. Sometimes the view of the loving God gets blurry.

This leaves many humans wavering in their thoughts about how God feels about them: there is so much good, and still so much evil in the world. What are we to make of this odd combination? Does he love us or not, a little or a lot, perfectly or imperfectly?

God wants you to know, and he tells you through his servant, St. John: **This is how God’s love for us was revealed: God sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we may live through him. This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.** Look into the manger of Bethlehem and behold: here is divine proof positive of God’s perfect and eternal love for you and all people! The holy God, who despises all sin in every form and condemns to death all sinners, has sent his only Son, his divine Son from all eternity, to save us from sin and death. This is not only love, it is love that is unknowable and unimaginable unless God reveals it to you.

And he has. He tells you the story of Jesus’ birth. You will hear it later through his servant, St. Luke. It is God’s revelation to you, so you know his love for you – and not just his love, his uniquely divine brand of love. Jesus comes to sinners who did not love God first. God loved us first, despite our sin that he so much hates, and so he sent the solution to that sin. He sent Jesus to atone for us, to reconnect us to God. Jesus comes to be perfect, without any sin at all. And he comes to be perfect for you. He comes to sacrifice himself for your sins and mine, to make us at one with God. It was the only sacrifice high and holy enough to satisfy God’s wrath toward sin; it could only be his only-begotten Son! That was what it took to satisfy his wrath. And he has given it to us in love, before we gave anything to him.

That is God’s love, revealed in Jesus Christ. And it comes **so that we may live through him.** Here is the answer to everything we see that may cause us to doubt God’s love: yes, the world can be an awful place, because it’s fallen and full of sinful imperfection. But there is a life to come, a life in heaven that is ours through Jesus’ sacrifice, the atonement that brings us back to God. There is a life to come, through Jesus – a perfect and everlasting life. Even now, this puts all the trouble of the world in perspective. Even now, Jesus’ people can live with divine hope and peace. As all the trouble of world swirls around, we rest in the love of God that he’s revealed in Jesus.

This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. We know that in Jesus, God is in us and we are in him. Notice that word, “know.” We don’t guess. We don’t blindly hope. We know. God has revealed it, through the pen of those who were there, the testimony of those who saw it in person and recorded with no reason to lie: **the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.**

“The world” is who God loves with the divine love he has revealed. The world is who he wants to know, to believe the revelation of his love in Jesus. Here is how the world will know: **Dear friends, if God loved us so much, we also should love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love has been brought to its goal in us.** This is the mission of every believer: to love each other the way God has loved us. Love me before I am lovable, even when I am unlovable. Love me with deep sacrifice – we could never sacrifice anything as precious as Jesus, but we can sacrifice deeply for each other. Love so much, like God. Do not walk away from me when I’m in trouble, but get me out of it. God loves us so much, and has revealed it. Let’s love each other the same way. Let’s show the world, starting with those nearest us. Let’s show them how much God loves us in the way we love each other.

No one has ever seen God. It may seem like a strange thing for St. John to say at this point, when he has already said that Jesus has come and we have seen him. Here’s what I think he means: God is now invisible, ever since Jesus’ ascension. God is spirit. In order to see him and to know him, to see and know his divine love, a person must see the revelation of Jesus in his Word. And this is why they will listen: because they see the love of God between us, love undeserved, sacrificing deeply, rescuing from trouble. **Dear friends, if God loved us so much, we should also love one another.**

“If” is probably not the best way to translate that little word the Holy Spirit gave to St. John. “Because” or “since” gets at the meaning better. It is the truth God has revealed: he loves us unlovable sinners, and gives his most precious, his only-begotten Son to atone for our sin and give us perfect life forever. His love comes into the world that sin wrecked and saves us from it for eternity. See his love revealed tonight. May it fill us with the same love. May we love like him, because of his love for us! Amen.